

Events as a source of competitive advantage for destinations

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Abstract

World tourism is going towards cultural tourism in the few last years. Today, tourists are looking especially for different cultures and living styles. Event tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the tourism industry. The growing interest for special events may provide profitable activities in the community. Events are a unique form of tourism attraction and are an important motivator of tourism. The programming of events in tourist destinations normally presupposes two objectives: to increase the number of visitors during the period when the events are taking place, and to increase exposure of the region through publicity and media coverage. Event tourism can contribute positively to a locality, but not automatically secure local economic development.

The aim of this paper is to determine the role and impacts of events in the image of Korca 's region and as an important source to generate incomes to the host area. The Korca Beer fest, already a festival well-known throughout all of Albania and the region, has been honored with the Albanian tourism prize, awarded by the Minister of Tourism, Youth and Sports and the Albanian Tourism Association. This paper supports those of other authors who have found that events are catalyzing phenomena for attracting and satisfying visitors, and as such, that they are an important vehicle for the formation of the image of a destination.

Key words: tourism events, image of destination, economic development, number of visitors, impacts of events

Introduction

Events are a series of unique project. The finite nature of some of the critical resources, such as special skills, means that these have to be taken into account in the planning process and the overriding priority is to complete the project within a given time, to a given date and hour. Wild (2002) defines a project as an activity with a specific goal occupying a specific period of time. An event is a project, since it is a finite activity in terms of the time spent in its duration and in the use of resources. Therefore it is essential to plan the event thoroughly and to schedule all the activities so that as a whole they form the event. Waters point out that although there are many similarities between scheduling in manufacturing and in service, there is essential differences. First, in the service industry the customer is directly involved in the process. Secondly, services cannot be held in stock, because they are perishable and intangible. Thirdly, there are often wide variations in demand. All these points are particularly true in the event industry.

Methodological approach

In this paper is implemented a three-step methodological approach in order to formulate a framework for events management such as: a) a framework of events 's analysis and their factors) planning events, and implications of events in the destination.

Event context

Scheduling in the event industry is very important. Scheduling is the art of: event component breakdown; activity analysis; deciding the order of completing activities; arranging the necessary resources to complete each activity; arranging the timing of activities.

Tukel and Rom (2011) have research various definitions of what a project is. Initially they offered three objectives for a project- that it should be:

1. Completed on time
2. Completed within budget
3. Completed at the desired level of quality.

Kerzner (1994) added a further two performance measurements:

4. Customer satisfaction and acceptance of the outcome
5. Customers allowing the contractor to use them as a reference.

A variety of authors identify the extent of the event industry and create typologies in order to consider, in more manageable groupings, the diversity of the event industry, its sectors and its markets.

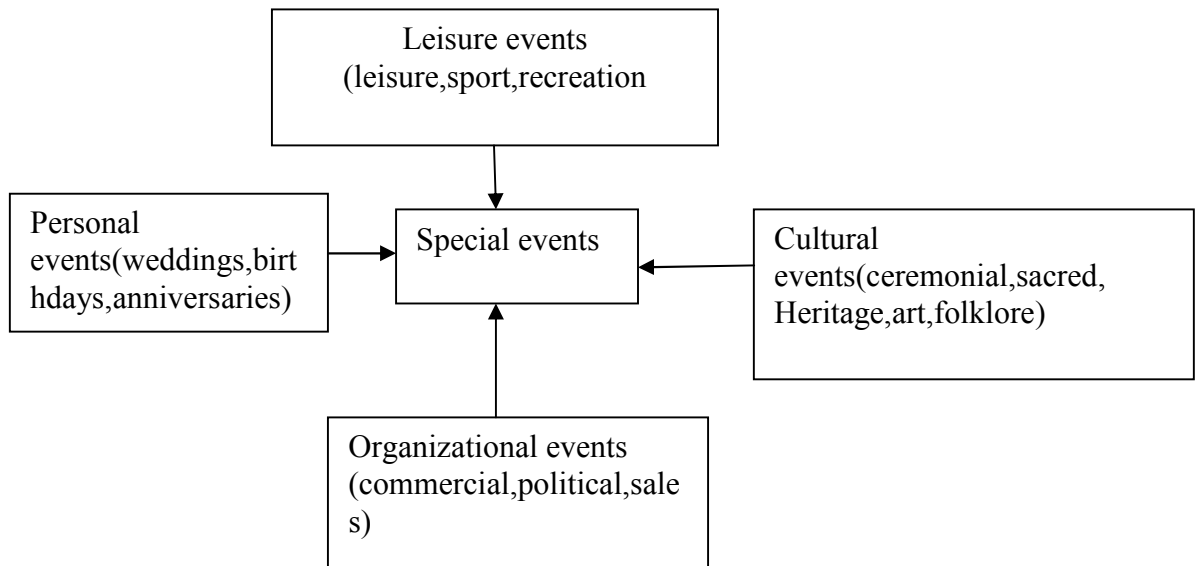


Fig1. Shone and Parry typology of events (2004)

They suggest a particular typology which we use as a starting point in order to understand the breadth and variety of events. All events are unique and it is this uniqueness that makes them special and creates a challenge for the manager. There are four different characteristics of events that are important to the event organizer are:

1. Size and volume of output
2. Complexity and variety of service&products offered to the consumer
3. Uncertainty of numbers attending, cost, time schedule and technical requirements
4. Interaction with the consumer and degree of consumer and customer contact.

At the start of planning for the event several activities can be started, but most activities will be depend on others finishing. As more activities finish, even more can be started. Some of these early activities may include getting special power and utility requirements to the event site, and special licenses may also need to be applied for. For the majority of events, a backwards scheduling activity occurs-i.e., the finish date and hour is known, all the activities are listed, plus their expected completion times, and then the schedule is calculated backwards so that all activities can be sequenced appropriately and finished by the due date.

Critical path analysis is a planning and scheduling tool that can help to streamline all the processes to be undertaken. Getz examines the relationship between all the resources and the activities that need to be undertaken in order to “deliver” the event- i.e., those listed in the activity analysis. All these activities should be arranged in chronological order, working back from the event date so that each prerequisite activity gets scheduled in proper sequence. When all the activities are linked and the dates by which those tasks should be finished by have been identified, a line can be drawn to establish how long the event preparation and lead up to delivery will take. The activity analysis has determined the critical dates when each task has to be finished by, and by whom. Some tasks can be done simultaneously, whereas others may have to wait until others have been completed.

Types of events

There are many different ways of categorizing or grouping events, including by size, form and content. Events are characterized according to their size and scale. Common categories are major events, mega – events, hallmark events and local/community events, although definitions are not exact. Local or community events are present in Korca Region. Most communities produce a host of festivals and events that are targeted mainly at local audiences and staged primarily for their social, fun and entertainment value. These events often produce a range of benefits, including engendering pride in the community, strengthening a feeling of belonging and creating a sense of place. They can also

help to expose people to new ideas and experiences, encourage participation in sports and activities and encourage tolerance and diversity. For these reasons local governments often support such events as part of their community and cultural development strategies.

Event Tourism

Governments support at all levels has been integral to the expansion of event tourism. Responsibility for progressing event tourism efforts varies from destination to destination. In the context of smaller destinations, such as towns and regions, involvement may be limited to tourism promotional bodies, local government and the local chamber of commerce. A strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis is a useful way of assessing the situation that a destination faces in its efforts to develop event tourism. The role event tourism is required to play in destination's tourism development efforts will vary according to the overall tourism strategy that is being pursued. It is important the development of an event tourism strategy. In terms of general strategic options available to a town, city, country, region or country's event tourism body, several possibilities can be identified. These strategies concern the development of existing events, bidding to attract exiting events and the creation of new events. These three broad strategic options are not mutually exclusive-for example, event tourism bodies in any one destination may employ composite strategies involving two or all three, of these options to achieve their destination's event tourism goals. Whatever strategy is selected, it needs to reflect the insights gained from the proceeding situational analysis. In making decisions about what event tourism strategy pursue, it can be useful to think in terms of what «portfolio» (or mix) of events (festivals, sporting competitions, business events, etc.) is likely to deliver the required benefits for a destination from event tourism. A useful first step in this regard is to rate events- using available data and professional judgment-against established criteria. A simple 1 (low) to 5 (high) rating system could be employed for this purpose. If appropriate, a weighting could also be applied to each criterion, so the final numeric value associated with each criterion, multiplied by the importance of that criterion. A useful approach to

thinking about the «mix» of events at a destination is to view them from a hierarchical perspective. Using this approach, events with high tourism value and the capacity to progress many of an event tourism body's goals would appear at the top, while those with lower tourism value and limited ability to progress the organization's goals would be placed at the bottom.

Planning and Organization of events

The above points as well as the posed questions would raise a number of inter-related issues:

- Since the community must value, be heard and be fully represented in the making of any event, particularly cultural ones, and then who should represent the community as a whole?
- If this, like any other task, can be handled through a representative committee, then who should be its members and why?
- How can tourism enterprises be assured that they too are represented and their financial interests/ returns assured?
- How can the interest of potential tourists be accommodated?
- What needs to be done if this to turn into an event celebrated on a regular basis(such as annually)

These and many other issues should remain in the center of any planning and organization schemes. In order to make cultural events work for the host, the guest, and the industry working as the broker, questions under this heading, as well as those posed earlier, need to be merged for systemic thinking and action plans.

A framework for the efficient events management

The need for a framework which is not only able to demonstrate the multitude of fields, factors, influences and processes that may affect the development of event tourism in different context, but which also provides a logical and systematic process to be followed in managing event tourism. Some key elements are:

- *Context, environment and strategy*: this initial analysis is a necessary step to a strategic perspective. Once this analysis has been performed, attention can be paid to preparing a tourism development strategy
- *Event tourism strategy*: embraces the supply of attractions and facilities, associated infrastructural developments and appropriate marketing plans, as well as visitor management strategies designed to optimize the visitor experience while minimizing the negative impacts on local population
- *Community participation/consultation*: It is vital that community participate to event to secure broad-based support and to identify public concern early on and take action to address these concerns.
- *Implementation*: Obviously, the necessary action plans are evolving through the strategy's implementation process. Appropriate action plans for each area should be carried out.
- *Event marketing strategy*: It has been suggested that an appropriate strategy would be to establish/ build up a portfolio of events, ranging from the occasional international or national mega event to regular or one-time local events. This strategy would generate a series of beneficial outcomes, i.e. take advantage of an event by directly associating it to destination's image, increase awareness of the hosting destination/city.
- *Event evaluation and monitoring*: The success of strategies and plans should be systematically monitored and assessed. Johnsen(2005) suggested an indicator system to ensure and measure the effectiveness and efficiency of events. This system could be used for management purposes, i.e. to avoid negative impacts of future events; and for benchmarking, i.e to assess impacts, processes or products in comparison to other competitors. It is important to focus on monitoring the motivations for attendees and the levels of attendee and organizer satisfaction. Understanding motives is an important ingredient in «getting the product right» and developing events that most fully meet the needs of participants. The phases of monitoring and evaluation, necessary steps within a strategic management approach, should lead to reconsider and modify strategies and plans, if necessary.

However, it should be stressed that event tourism requires a case-study approach, as each destination is likely to adopt a unique combination of management and marketing policies according to local needs. This approach allows improving our knowledge and rendering events more effective in achieving particular objectives.

Korca-the city of events!

The region of Korca lies in Albania's southeastern part and has a surface area of 3697 km². It borders the District of Elbasan and the FYROM to the North, the Greek Republic to the East, the District of Gjirokastra to the South and District of Berati to the West. Approximately 58% of the surface area of the District is made up of mountainous area, 17% hilly area and only 25% field area. The annual average temperature is 10.6 C degrees. November is the month characterized by many precipitations. The most dominating winds are the northern and southwestern ones. The woodland area takes 135 947 ha, consisting in beech, oak, pine, fir and poplar trees. Korca is the biggest administrative areas of southeastern Albania, the biggest town of the region founded in the 15th century. It was an important trading center where the caravans had destinations such as Turkey, Greece and Russia. Tourism in Korca is considered as a complementary branch of economy but it can generate considerable incomes if it would be carefully planned and have a coordination of all tourism actors. The city of Korca is situated in southeastern part of Albania. The area occupied by the city today is a former Illyrian settlement. The potential for tourism development in Korca and the surrounding area is high thanks to its historical, cultural and natural wealth. Millennia of history and culture have created a very attractive and interesting location to visit, as well as to live. Korca is mentioned as a castle in 1280 and in 1431, as an inhabited castle. After 1484, the city started to expand and development gaining the feature of an urban and regional centre. The city has participated historically in intensive exchange of culture and trade with Byzantium and Greece. Neolithic remains indicate the successive occupation of the city area for the last 6000 years.

Korca is frequently mentioned for its festive atmosphere. The «Events Calendar 2010», is the first of its kind in Albania. It lists a number of important national and international cultural activities, festivals and fairs held from April through December 2010. In order to provide Korca its due credit, the Municipality has worked tirelessly to ensure its citizens and visitors enjoyed a festive atmosphere all the year round. There are some activities in this city:

Cultural international events:

✓ *The international Symposium «Sculpture of the park»- June 25th- July 5th.* This important event is organized for the third time. During two weeks Albanian and international sculptors come to the city to participate in this international symposium. Their sculptures are given as a gift to the city park. The second annual organization of this symposium, aims to establish «Rinia» park as an open museum of contemporary art.

✓ *The International Painters Colony «Mio's Days»- October 25th.* The International painters colony held for the fourth time in the city, was named after the famous Korca painter Vangjush Mio and aims to establish communication among participants and promote the city's cultural asset. Painters from Albania and abroad will treat Korca as an open studio, exploring the city to inspire their talent. 40 painters from different countries are now part of the colony.

✓ *«Sotir» International Photography Competition-May.* The «Sotir» International Photography Competition is named after Kristaq Sotiri, a professional photographer, who established the tradition of photography. Photographers from different countries come to Korca to present their work in this competition.

✓ *Beer Fest-August.* Summer events reach their peak with the organization of the biggest fest of the year «Beer Fest». Beer Fest, the largest festival well-known throughout all of Albania and the region, has been honored with the Albanian Tourism Prize, awarded by the Minister of Tourism, Youth and Sports, and the Albanian Tourism Association. The concept for the beer festival began in 2007, continuing in full throughout the following years in all its components. Besides the festival concept and complete package that it offers (infrastructure, participation, show, decorative elements etc.), organizers have used a communications and promotion strategy that has directed the Korca beer

festival to an unconditional success. The jury qualified Beer Fest as one of the best-practice examples for other cities of Albania and honored it with the Albanian Tourism Prize for 2010, as an ongoing effort of the Municipality, private businesses and social groups from the city of Korca and their contributions to the strengthening of the Albanian tourism sector. Amongst the 16 competitors taking part in the selection were municipalities, organizations and agencies operating in the field of tourism. Beer fest has become, in this manner, a fixed date in calendars, drawing national and international attention. This event promotes Korca's values and make it more attractive to national and international tourists.

Impacts-- Promoted the city as an event center during the summer. Holiday beer has already consolidated premise to become a national scale celebration.

- 10 000 people each night were participants in the festival's largest city
- Thousands of foreign and domestic tourists already know Korca as the only place the organization of this celebration.

- Local businesses and other participants had satisfactory incomes from sales of their products and were promoted beyond Korça market.

- Other local businesses that benefited (Hotel/ 530 beds, bars, restaurants, travel agencies, transport vehicles etc.)

- Vitalization of life in the city.

For 2007, project value was 7 400 000 lek and 700 000 from of this was from the municipality of Korca. .Now, the municipality of Korca invests 600 000 lek for this event and the other part of expenditure of this event is by donators.

- ✓ *Korca Carnivals*-may .Korca is well known for her famous Carnival. It has revitalized this tradition, creating one the most sensational activities of the city. Last year organized in two days. First day carnivals and serenades. Second day, local national and international groups will parade in front of thousand of citizens and visitors. On June 21, the day of opening of tourist

season in the city of Korça festival was organized carnivals, where take part about 30 groups from the city of Korça, Tirana, Berat, Shkoder, as well as Italy, Macedonia and Montenegro. Korça, famous for the Carnival organization, restored strongly them to turn into a yearly tradition of the city.

Impacts

- Create a festive atmosphere of this kind of unprecedented
- Develop citizens desire to become part of the carnival, as many citizens were carnivals clothing.
- Contributed more to the hotel business, because all the hotels (citing some of the most important hotels like Kocibelli, Grand, Regency, etc. with a capacity of 530 beds) were booked with people from Tirana and other cities within and abroad country. This event had impacts on facilities, local bars and restaurants during the day in which visitors and participants were in the celebration of Carnival.
- Promoted as the only city and town the best it can be celebrated Carnival.

For 2007, project value was 330000 lek and 1800000 from of this, was from the municipality of Korça. Now, the municipality of Korça invests 2 000 000 lek for this event and the other part of expenditure of this event is by donators. This event was attended by about 10,000 persons and 10 businesses. Also by thousands of other people in the entire country had the opportunity to pursue direct transmission to Top News, powered by successful partnerships we have already established with one of the most successful National TV Top Channel.

✓ *Pie Fest- July.* Inspired by the famous Korça pie «The Lakror», the Pie Fest, has become a popular event for the city. In July, in the city park, women from Korça in front of the curious eyes of visitors can bake «Lakror» in the traditional way. Music, child program and other surprises will be part of this special event of the city. This event was organized in the form of a picnic where citizens from Korça and not only tasted pie made especially for this celebration,

cooking and baking saw the pie with two noodles from women's Korça, with music from famous singers city, this celebration had a strong promotion in the media and national press.

Impact

- A new special celebration of the city of Korca affirmed the slogan "City Fest" and brought curious tourists to the city from Tirana and Durres especially for this celebration.

- Hundreds of citizens Korça became part of the city's youngest holiday.
- Partnership with local businesses help to understand the importance of the organization of various events as a important factor in tourism development in the city and the economic development of its.

- Profits of businesses participating in the celebration

✓ *The end year fair-December.* With the slogan "Korca celebrates even in winter" and under the wonderful decorations that cover the city in December, Korca Organizes its end year holiday fair, the only one in Albania. The festive atmosphere is enhanced with wooden houses, toys sweets, traditional drinks (hot wine)baked apples, music and open exhibitions. The fair was organized in downtown before the Cathedral from 4-31 December 2008. On the opening day of the fair, burned the city lights. Traditional wooden houses and tents located on the square before cathedral sell products of all kinds (ornaments, gifts, toys for kids, sweets, traditional drinks, wine, tea, etc.).

Moreover during the fair, city center organized a series of various events such as puppet theater, parades and granddad, open exhibitions, live music etc.

Impact

- City again promoted as a city that knows celebrate, becoming one of the most important cities in Albania for tourism events. Fair and festive décor of the city was promoted by popular media such as Top Channel, Klan, News 24 etc
- Numerous local and foreign tourists were present on specific days of the Fair. Every day of December, the fair was visited by dozens of visitors.

- Local businesses participating in the fair were also beneficial, not only thanks to the incomes, but thanks to this new way of promoting their business.
- City and citizens had a Korça otherwise, a different downtown, a fun otherwise. The city was not alive in a special day, but during an entire month.

For 2007, project value was 1605000 lek and 1200000 from of this, was from the municipality of Korca. Now, the municipality of Korca invests 800 000 lek for this event and the other part of expenditure of this event is by donators.

Conclusion and recommendation

Over the last decades, events in general have gained importance and contributed to the development and rejuvenation of a destination. In the field of events management, the overall goal is to ensure efficiency and effectiveness and competitiveness of events, understood as their ability to achieve quality. Events should be a component of destination's strategic planning and management contributing to optimize beneficial outputs.

It is never easy to draw concrete conclusions or recommendation from a general overview, as this talk intended to be. There are some conclusions for consideration:

- Cultural events can function as community binders, enforcing the sociocultural fabric of the host. Therefore, this role should be studied and clearly understood, with its realization as a central goal.
- Since events typically cause animation, the level of tolerance of the host should be measured for the compatibility.
- It is understood that gains should be more than economic. Among other things, they can and should include community development, site/location improvement, contributions to societal institutions and even increase in the per capita happiness of the host with the event.
- The host community should always be supportive and involved in tourism. This is even more important in the case of cultural events which reach into the soul and spirit, colors and flavors of the lives of its members.

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